

# New French, Spanish and Italian Books

By REGIS MICHAUD.

A PERIOD of a few months which has seen the publication of Anatole France's *Le Petit Pierre*, Paul Bourget's *Le Justicier*, René Bazin's *Les Nouveaux Oberlé*, Sacha Guitry's *Pasteur* and Rostand's *Le Vol de la Marseillaise* will certainly be marked with a white stone in the annals of French letters.

France's *Petit Pierre* is already known to the readers of *Books and the Book World*. It is a worthy sequel of *Pierre Nozière* and *The Book of My Friend*, a delightful mixture of tales, witty satire and philosophy. The war has certainly not made Anatole France less ironical, indulgent and witty.

To be at the same time a writer of fiction and a professional moralist, a sociologist and politician is once more, in *Le Justicier*, the paradox of Paul Bourget. Leaving aside all questions of doctrine, in *Le Justicier*, as already in *L'étape* or *Le sens de la mort*, will be found at its best the art of Bourget to illustrate a moral conflict—here the case of a man who takes upon himself the sins of his own brother—by a well chosen story.

French novels will probably for some time to come continue to bear the stamp of war. *Clarté* by Barbusse is his *Under Fire* in a new garb. It is the same arraignment of war with, maybe, this time more optimism. The visions of peaceful labor in the first and last part of the book make a striking and dramatic contrast with the battle scenes, and there is running through the book an undercurrent of mysticism which will not escape the attentive reader. Barbusse's political views may be wrong; he remains, nevertheless, in *Clarté*, as already in *Under Fire*, a wonderful artist of the school of Zola, with all the improvements, in his descriptions especially, of twentieth century literary pyrotechnics.

## II.

René Bazin finishes in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* the publication of his *Nouveaux Oberlé*. It is the story of an Alsatian family reunited to France. The war seems to have widened Bazin's philosophy and art. The chapters in the book where Bazin takes us on the Russian battlefields with his hero, Joseph, the Alsatian on the German side, remind one of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Reading the book one dreams of a less narrow and provincial Bazin, a cosmopolitan Bazin who to solve the problems of France would consent to take a trip around the world. Of special interest is the character of Pierre Lancier, the Alsatian in the French ranks, who personifies the problem of the readaptation of the people of Alsace to France, not without many perplexities, fortunately cleared at the end of the book.

René Boylesse, who has just entered the French Academy, is the most modest and the most refined of French novelists. His *L'enfant à la balustrade* [*The Child on the Balcony*] and *La jeune fille bien élevée* [*A Well Brought Up Young Maiden*] are delightful novels to be recommended especially to the American reader for their clear and savory French as well as for their keen insight into French life and bourgeois society.

A strange and also pessimistic book is *La Roue* [*The Wheel*] by Elie Faure, a soldier, an art critic and the author of another war book, *La Sainte Face*. True to its title that novel of Faure, half Romain Rolland, half Barbusse, takes us through a real whirlwind, from the trenches to the quietude of the Swiss Alps "above the strife," with a conscientious objector who finally dies a brave soldier, if not a convinced one, in battle; then through the most gorgeous Italian descriptions back to the battlefield to see the two heroes of the novel helplessly crushed by the wheel. The wheel whirls and carries away men and women in a frantic love story. A new art is felt in that book, half lyricism, half painting, with the love of life for its motto and also a tinge of mysticism throughout—the main characteristics probably to be found in French books after the war.

Romain Rolland's new novel *Colas Breugnot* will be a disappointment for many readers of *Jean Christophe* and also a revelation of Rolland in a new mood. Written before the war to escape

from the tragic trend of *Jean Christophe*, *Colas Breugnot* is an original composition. The book is written in the spirit and style of Rabelais and the mediæval French "fabliaux," half prose, half verse, which fact will hardly surprise the readers who had already detected the poet lurking in *Jean Christophe* behind the novelist and the musician. We like that seventeenth century incarnation of the French Jacques Bonhomme, completely cleared of German "sehnsucht" and disguising his social pessimism and discontent under the "rire gaulois." Why did Rolland go across the Rhine to fetch a German *Jean Christophe* when Colas Breugnot was at hand?

## III.

The war has inspired many French poets and among others the late Edmond Rostand, whose war poems are now published by Fasquelle in Paris under the title of *Le Vol de la Marseillaise* [*The Flight of the Marseillaise*]. Some of the worst and also of the best Rostand will be found in the volume. Among other poems for the American reader we may point to *The Song of the Stars*, which recalls Whitman's *Song of the Banner at Daybreak*; to the piece entitled *Hello*, hailing the first arrival of American soldiers on the Marne. *La charge*, *Condolences* (on the sinking of the *Lusitania*), and others remind one of the best satires of Victor Hugo in his *Châtiments*.

The gem of the collection is probably *L'étoile entre les peupliers* [*The Star Among the Poplar Trees*] with a dramatic evocation of the French trooper in the past ages and a fine philosophy of French patriotism in the form of a catechism.

To the reader tired of war tragedies we recommend the brothers Tharaud's *Les Heures Marocaines* [*Hours in Morocco*] and Jean Giraudoux's *Amica America*. The brothers Tharaud made a name for themselves before the war with *La Servante Maitresse* [*The Mistress Servant*] and *La Tragédie de Ravallac*, and more recently *A l'Ombre de la Croix* [*In the Shadow of the Cross*]. Theirs is a new and very artistic realism. It is Flaubert's art and method to which, in the *Heures Marocaines*, the Tharauds have added the glamour of Pierre Loti without his pessimism. The book is an entirely original addition to French colonial literature. One at least of the Tharauds has been during the war on the staff of that fine French consul of North Africa, Gen. Lyautey, who saved Morocco for France, then fighting for life, with all her resources thrown into the fray, on the Marne. Morocco, in the Tharauds' book, enters French literature as did America in Chateaubriand's novels and the near and far East in those of Loti. All the lure and fascination of picturesque Africa hold in the Tharauds' prose as they did in the paintings of Delacroix and Eugène Fromentin.

Jean Giraudoux in his *Amica America* could be labelled a French Henry James if he were not so much like a reincarnation of that philosopher of French flirt in the eighteenth century, Marivaux. Sometimes a conceited "pointilliste," always an original artist and the most fascinating of French present day "imagists," Jean Giraudoux has invented a new way of writing. His are the imagination and techniques of a Japanese artist. For some time a Harvard student, then an instructor of the Harvard regiment, his artistic originality makes Giraudoux find a United States of his own. The book, finely printed and illustrated by Maxime Dethomas, will stand, despite a few eccentricities, as a sample of modern French art at its newest and its cleverest.

## IV.

Books of essays and criticism are many. Among them, those who have already read *The New Book of Martyrs and Civilization* will gladly hail Georges Duhamel's new book, *La Possession du Monde* [*The Possession of the World*]. In the present conflict and quarrel between French intellectuals and mystics, Duhamel sides with the latter. Reading in particular in the new book the essays on *Lyrical Life* and the final chapter on *The Rule of the Heart*, one cannot help thinking of Duhamel as of a French Emerson and a new Maeterlinck. Even those inclined to prefer the French mind in its pure intellectuality will be thankful to Duhamel for revealing the grave and spiritual concerns of present day France.

In the field of literary criticism and biography Abel Lefranc's two volumes in favor of Lord Derby as the writer of the works of Shakespeare, *Sous le Masque de*

Shakespeare [*Under the Mask of Shakespeare*], would be enough to fill the leisure of a summer vacation. Was it not only yesterday that Augustin Hémon discovered Rowland in Shakespeare? Henri Bordeaux's *Les Pierres du Foyer* [*The Stones of the Hearth*] is made out of very instructive essays on French family life and education since the Middle Ages. Chief among those critical essays let us mention two interesting volumes on Victor Hugo. The one by M. C. Poinso, *Après de Victor Hugo* [*At the Side of Victor Hugo*], makes Hugo, the man and the poet, almost a demigod, while that French statesman and man of letters, Louis Barthou of the French Academy, in his *Les Amours d'un Poète* [*A Poet's Love Story*] brings us with Victor Hugo very near the level of common humanity. (Most of the book is made out of unpublished letters in the possession of M. Barthou). In *Quelques Guides de l'Opinion en France Pendant la Guerre* [*Some Guides of French Public Opinion During the War*] M. de Chambure writes very vivid and personal sketches of most of the leading journalists and editors of France. He also gives a useful summary of the war activities of the French press. To his clever sketch of Clemenceau may be added as a complement Gustave Gefroy's new volume on *Clemenceau*, printed in both French and in English—a sign of the times. M. Gefroy is the president of the Goncourt Academy and knows intimately the man he writes about. In complete contrast with the Republican Tiger of France the American reader will find in the tribute to Charles Maurras by his friends, *Charles Maurras, Portraits, Judgments and Opinions* (at the Nouvelle Librairie Nationale), a very illuminating study of that French political prophet and master writer of to-day.

## V.

In the field of Italian literature Virgilio Brocchi has shown himself an Italian Barbusse in *Secondo il Cuor Mio* [*According to My Heart*]. It is the story of an Italian conscientious objector (decidedly a stock character of European war books since Romain Rolland fled to Switzerland) who loathes modern materialism, who fights with all his energy through art, love and death toward the good and the beautiful, who emigrates to Australia to find the peace of his soul, who volunteers as a stretcher bearer during the war, who comes very near to being court-martialled by his own people and finally dies a heroic death in battle, without, however, surrendering any of his pacific and pacifist ideals. A valuable book for the light it throws on the modern Italian soul with its atavistic mysticism, its passion for art and beauty—all that blended with up to date socialistic and humanitarian aspirations.

Guido Da Verona, with a spirit as worthy as his name of the Italian quattrocento, takes us far away from reality in his *Il Libro del Mio Sogno Errante* [*The Book of My Wandering Dreams*], a book full of delightful fantasy. Young Italy is in it with her superabundant energies, her efforts, sometimes as paradoxical as they are noisy, to free herself from the shackles of her ancient culture, according to the new programme of Signor Marinetti and his futurist brothers. Boccaccio and Oscar Wilde revive in those charming essays, half prose, half poems, certainly the product of a wide and cosmopolitan culture, just the kind of book to take on a journey to read and enjoy in the very mood and way it was written.

Spanish literature offers two interesting

comedies. The first is from the pen of Jacinto Benavente, now known in American translations. *Los Cachorros* [*The Cubs*], Benavente's last comedy, is full of genuine humor and human pathos. It takes a philosopher as well as a consummate artist to make us interested in the family feuds and moral stunts of a flying circus. De Goncourt had already tried it in *The Brothers Zingaro*. The circus Rigoberto in Benavente's play is a representative circus and the whole of humanity is contained in its narrow ring. All the pathos and comic sides of the profession will be found in those unforgettable characters, as typical as they are sharply individualized.

*Cobardías* [*Cowardice*], by Manuel Linares Rivas, is a far different play and a half indignant, half amused social satire. All the plight of Spain, torn between the past and modernity, is there. Reading Rivas's arraignment of the Spanish hidalgo one thinks of Dumas or Augier indicting the noble in favor of the bourgeois in *The Question of Money* or *The Son-in-law of Monsieur Poirer*. That the realist and practical man of to-day suffers from the aristocrat's cowardice in not adapting himself to modern social conditions, and that the idle and quixotic hidalgo survives only thanks to the cowardice of the common man is the moral lesson of the play.

To conclude, let us draw the attention of the readers to an interesting volume of essays on Spanish and South American writers, *Poetas y Proistas del Novecientos* [*Twentieth Century Poets and Prose Writers*] by R. Cansinos-Assens. Attractive among others are the chapters on Ruben Dario, Enrique Gomez Carillo and Ricardo Leon.

## "The Hen at Work"

IDEAS on how to keep or how to raise chickens differ. In bygone days all one had to get was an old box, either soap, piano or otherwise, a china egg, some cracked corn and a dipper of water, but at present it is otherwise. The hen and birdhouse industry—we feel safe in calling it an industry—has seen a development equal to that of house and home architecture. Chickens used to lay eggs in abundance to show their appreciation of a beautiful world, but in these days we have many Bolshevik hens who do nothing but eat and cackle. They don't believe in enriching their owners.

Still, many of the good standard American breeds work overtime with the greatest of pleasure. And for those who would be Capitalists in eggs and chickens Ernest Cobb's *The Hen at Work*, a brief manual of home poultry culture, has been written.

The book is practical and will be found helpful by people who wish to or are already raising poultry in a small way with success and profit. Mr. Cobb gives valuable suggestions on the selection of breeds, their care and feeding, the building of economical houses, coops, runs; how incubators should be operated; how to doctor diseases in chickens, and in fact everything that it is necessary for one to know in regard to poultry.

There are many illustrations of practical coops, pictures of the development of the egg in its incubating stages, and above all, a picture of the water pan which replaces the dippers, saucepans, &c., of old. A handy book around the house.

THE HEN AT WORK. BY ERNEST COBB. G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$1.50.

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